
CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS AN OFFICER?

- What Is an Officer?
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 - Career Map

What is an Officer?

OATH OF OFFICE

All Coast Guard commissioned officers take the same oath every other military officer and the President of the United States has taken since George Washington. They swear or affirm:

- ☞ they will uphold the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and
- ☞ to bear true faith and allegiance to the same and to discharge well and faithfully the duties of the office to which appointed without any reservation or purpose of evasion.

PRESIDENTIAL AUTHORITY

The officer is given a commission stating the President of the United States, having reposed "special trust and confidence in [his or her] patriotism, valor, fidelity and abilities," has appointed the officer. Under the commission, the officer is directed to "carefully and diligently discharge the duties of the office to which appointed by doing and performing all manner of things."

CAREER PLANNING CONCEPTS

CAREER DECISIONS IT'S YOUR JOB!

A wide variety of resources and opinions are available to draw from in making career decisions. Other factors such as personal interests, family, or Service need, can influence a decision. At times, you may not get the billet you desire or the advanced training program you request. You have the ultimate responsibility to make informed career decisions.

CAREER PATH

Your career as a Coast Guard officer may span 20 to 30 years. You will serve in a sequence of assignments that will challenge your abilities, help you develop new abilities, and generally prepare you for greater challenges. This assignment sequence is referred to as a career path. Being aware of your opportunities and acting on them is the objective of career planning.

MATCHING TALENTS WITH NEEDS

The most important aspect of career planning is to match your desires, talents, and abilities with the Coast Guard's needs. You cannot expect to progress in your career if the Coast Guard does not require the skills you pursue. Equally, the Coast Guard cannot reasonably expect to maximize your effectiveness as an officer if it does not consider your desires, talents, and aspirations in meeting its officer corps requirements. This "match" is the goal of the career planning process.

MANAGING BILLETS

The Coast Guard has a wide range of specialty and skill requirements. It must manage a large number of officers to meet current needs and ensure needs also will be met in the future. Put another way, each assignment must be viewed as something more than providing an officer for a billet. It also must be considered as part of the growth process that develops qualified officers for future billets. These goals are not always entirely consistent, and planning and managing the process can be quite complex. Policies and procedures affecting the officer assignment process are in a constant state of flux. Understanding this complex, dynamic situation should permit you to make, or know how to make, informed decisions about your career plans. This is one of the objectives of this guide.

CAREER DECISIONS

At different times in your career, you must consciously decide which career path to seek, assignment to request, or training or education needed to fulfill your chosen career goals. These points are not clearly distinguishable; as no check-list identifies the necessary qualifications and sequence of assignments for each step in the career path. As is true in all professions, intelligent career decisions are based on past experience, professional motivation, and advice from informed sources, including commanding officers, role models, mentors, assignment officers, peers, and professional literature. All these factors blend gradually into a decision which at that career decision point best satisfies the Service's needs and your interests and desires. Where these needs and interests are in complete harmony, the result is professional success and personal satisfaction.

CAREER PLANNING CONCEPTS

NEEDS OF THE SERVICE

It is essential to understand that even though the Coast Guard desires to support individual preferences; the compromises, which sometimes must be made, cannot weigh exclusively in your favor. The Service's needs; budgetary and personnel constraints; the billets to be filled; and, its mission orientation are all important factors to understand. "**SERVICE**" is key. The "needs of the Service" are sometimes misunderstood. If you fail to understand this priority, your contribution to the Service will decrease along with your chance for a successful career.

GOALS OF A CAREER

You should develop your career with three goals in mind:

- ☞ Determine basic personal interests that best match the needs of the Service;
 - ☞ Fortify those interests by training and education to the best of your ability; and,
 - ☞ Seek opportunities to serve in areas that allow your fortified abilities to be best used.
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THE KEY

There is no one, absolute promotion path within the Coast Guard and no list of billets which will ensure advancement. The key to a successful Coast Guard career in any and every job assignment is

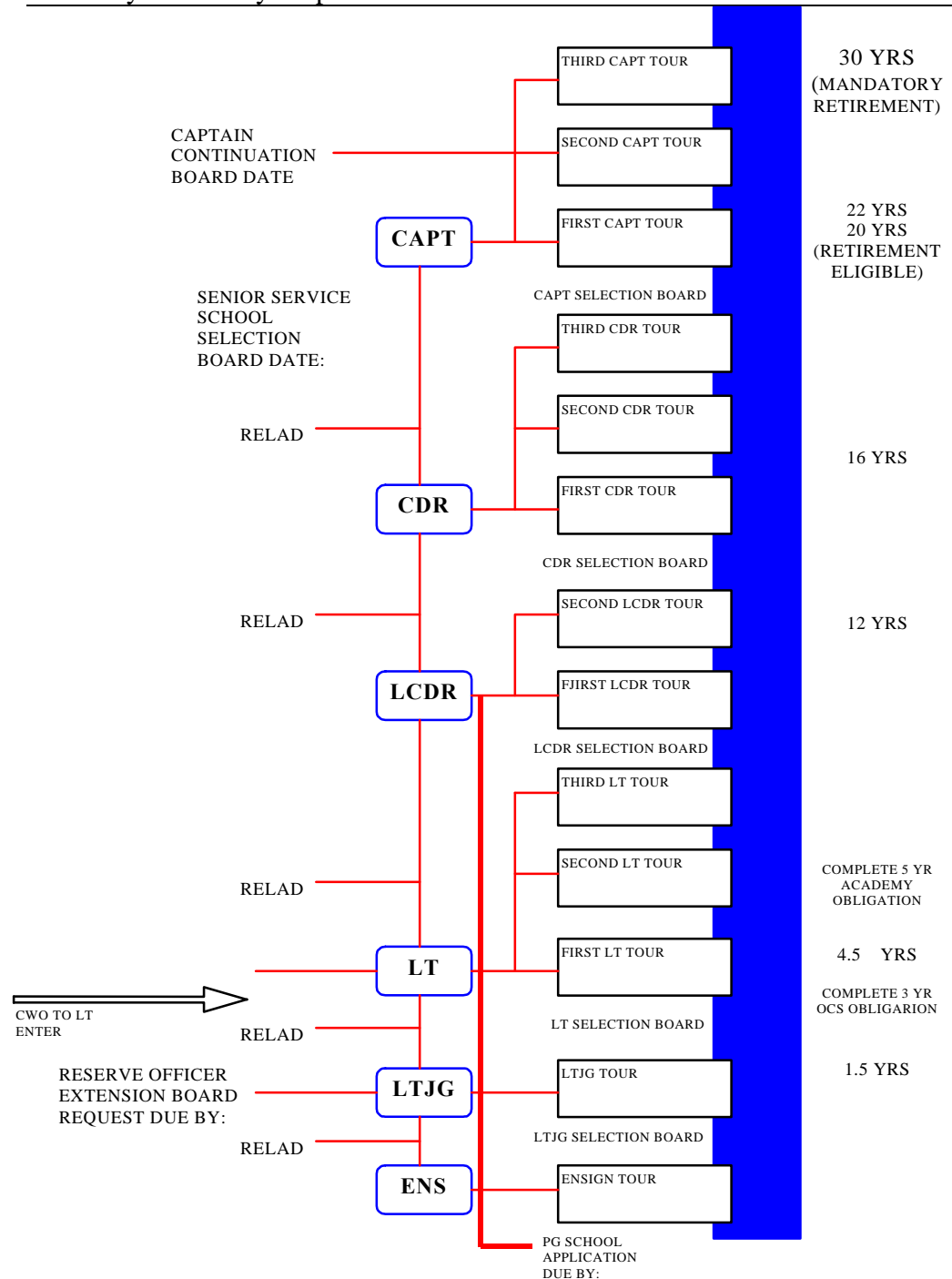
PERFORMANCE!

As successful officers progress in their careers, they build on their experiences through varied assignments and use this experience in current and future billets. Those officers who, over the years, best identify personal interests which the requirements of their assignments, and who amplify those interests through experience and education are most likely to continue to progress in the Coast Guard. The path is competitive.

CAREER MAP

PLANNING

A career map is one way to plan your Coast Guard career. Begin by writing down your goals. Next, identify important convening dates such as promotion boards, assignment and advanced training panels. As you plan assignments, be aware of tour length requirements and billet prerequisite prerogatives. Be flexible and remember strict adherence to a long-term career plan may not be possible as your and the Service's needs change. This career map is designed for active duty officers who enter the officer corps as ensigns. Modify it as necessary to match your particular career.



CAREER MAP

RESERVE CAREER PLANNING/MAP

Because of geographical considerations and the amount of time required for one to fully qualify for an assignment, the career map for reserve officers will be different than this one, including: tour lengths, types of assignments, identified career paths and fields, and attendance at special schools, among others. As this guidebook goes to press, a Commandant-chartered Quality Action Team (QAT) is reviewing the roles, training and career paths of reserve officers. The approved recommendations of that QAT may profoundly impact the career map of reserve officers, a career map that will be provided in the next update to this guidebook.
